Meet the Missus!

Comedy in One Act

By

KENYON NICHOLSON

SAMUEL FRENCH, Inc.

NEW YORK, N. Y.
25 West 45th Street

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CHARACTERS

RUBY LA MOTTE

BERT, *her husband*

DOLLY DOYLE, *the other woman*

SCENE: *A room in a New York hotel.*

TIME: *The present.*

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MEET THE MISSUS!

[NOTE: *Hotel Hildona, "the Home of Theatrical Folk," caters to vaudeville artists who desire to keep within running distance of the booking-offices along Broadway. It has a large without bath—as you wish. In the basement dining-room, where nightly a 75-cent six-course table d'hote dinner is served, it is not unusual to see a lion-tamer sit down to a lamb stew, and an acrobat toying with a plate of corned beef and cabbage, and a song-and-dance team divide a porterhouse—all at the same table. Here one may garner the latest gossip of the Rialto.*]

SCENE: *Room 345, Hotel Hildona, West 47th Street, New York City. It is the bed-room of* BERT LA MOTTE *and wife, of "La Motte and La Motte, That Natty Pair." One senses a parlor and bath in the offing. It is a typical third-class hotel bedroom; brass twin beds, a bureau, two chairs, lace curtains and a musty, red carpet. In the middle of the room is a table upon which rest side by side a Gideon Bible and a copy of "Variety." The room is strewn with clothes, which seem to have flowed from a wardrobe trunk standing in one corner.*

TIME: Three A.M.

At rise: RUBY LA MOTTE *is discovered, tucked up in bed, sound asleep. The other bed is unoccupied. A night-light wearing a dirty pink shade is the only illumination. . . . Pretty soon there is the sound of a key being fitted into the outside door. Enter* BERT LA MOTTE. *He is not intoxicated to the extent that he staggers, but he has reached the stage*

technically known as being "lit up." BERT *looks toward the bed, then whispers to someone in the doorway behind him.*

BERT. S'all right! She's dead to the world. Come on!

(*There enters* DOLLY DOYLE, *a blond creature who, from her paradise tips to her short-vamped pumps, is every inch an actress. She is not too old, and pretty in a rather obvious way.*)

DOLLY. Bert, this is fierce—this time o' night and all!

BERT. You ain't gettin' cold feet?

DOLLY. No, only——

BERT (*alcoholically confidential*). Now, listen to me, kid, we're doin' this on my say-so, and all I ask from you is just to keep mum. I'll do the talkin' for the both of us.

DOLLY. It's all wrong—you wouldn't be doin' this if you wasn't stewed.

BERT. Oh, wouldn't I? I s'pose you think livin' with Ruby's a panic. We're friendly like cat and dog!

(*Reassured,* DOLLY *crosses the room on tiptoe and looks at the sleeping* RUBY.)

DOLLY (*appraisingly*). She ain't so hard to look at. . . . From what you said I thought she was a scarecrow.

BERT. Ruby'd never get no blue ribbon at a beauty show, but she's got her good points.

DOLLY. She's about my height, wouldn't you say?

BERT. About. . . .

DOLLY. Seems to me I've run acrost her on the same bill some place. She ever played Interstate time out of Chicago?

BERT. Has she! There ain't no time this side o' Frisco Ruby ain't played! She comes from a family o' troupers. Before she married me she was doin' a sister act with her aunt. They were billed as the Sisters Maynard.

DOLLY. She looks sorta familiar all right. But then after a few years in the show business everybody you meet looks familiar. . . .

(RUBY *stirs uneasily in her sleep.*)

BERT (*sotto voce*). Shall I wake her up now? I wanta get this over with. . . .

DOLLY (*restraining him*). Leave her lay quiet a while. I ain't so sure this is just the way to break the news.

BERT. Sure it's the way! Open and above-board. Ain't that what we decided sittin' over there in Pete's place?

DOLLY. Well, it don't seem right somehow.

BERT. Now listen, Dolly, no use gettin' up in the air. It's plain as the nose on your face. You and me have fell for each other hard, and as it happens I'm married, there's only one thing to do—to tell Ruby.

DOLLY. You can tell her all right, but what'll *she* do?

BERT. Naturally, at first she'll prob'ly raise hell, but after she cools down she'll see it our way. I know Ruby like a book.

DOLLY. Maybe it's just because I ain't used to it yet. Remember, Bert, I never laid eyes on you before to-night.

BERT (*fondly*). But you admit you fell for me, doncha?

DOLLY. If I wasn't afraida makin' you stuck up I'd say so.

BERT. There's one thing I never told you yet. When Ruby and me was married we agreed if either the one or the other of us saw anyone we liked better we could break away—quit flat, without no fireworks, no regrets. That makes it sound better to you, don't it?

DOLLY. I think so. (*Suspiciously.*) This is really the first time since you been married you ever felt this way about anyone?

BERT. Absolutely! When you walked into Pete's to-night I felt I'd knowed you for years. You suited me from the ground up. And I'd just dropped in for a plate o' ham and eggs before goin' to bed. Why you s'pose I got the waiter to give me a knockdown to you if I wasn't so gone on you?

DOLLY. I admit it got me all fussed up—before the others and all.

BERT. When I found out you was a artist, too, that's all I needed! I went clear off my nut.

DOLLY. I'll say!

BERT. Wait till you see the act I'm goin' to frame for us! I tell you, kid, we're made for each other. We can't fight against it—it's bigger'n we are.

DOLLY (*modestly*). I don't wanta fight against it—if your wife'll give you up.

BERT (*beaming*). You'll never be sorry you said that. That's all I wanta know. (*Coming closer.*) Give us a kiss—for good luck!

DOLLY (*pushing him away virtuously*). Not till we've got the right! Nobody can say I ever come between husband and wife. Go on, wake her up. Let's get it over with.

BERT. Better not let her see you till she gets her bearings. She'll have enough of a shock as it is.

DOLLY. I'll say!

(DOLLY *moves to the other side of the room, where she stands in the shadow.* BERT *leans over the sleeping form of his wife.*)

BERT (*to* DOLLY). All ready?

DOLLY. Any time you are.

(BERT *plucks gingerly at the counterpane.*)

BERT. Ruby! Wake up and listen a minute. . . . Ruby!

(RUBY *stirs, but makes no further response.*)

DOLLY (*interested*). She's some hard sleeper!

BERT (*shaking* RUBY *gently*). Ruby! Shake it off!

(RUBY *opens her eyes and looks up wildly at her husband.*)

RUBY. Say, what's eatin' on you!

BERT. Listen, Ruby, I got something to tell you.

RUBY (*turning over again*). Don't wanta hear it. . . . I need my sleep!

BERT (*to* DOLLY). You see! That's the kind o' wife I got!

(BERT *shakes* RUBY *again.*)

BERT. You gotta wake up, Ruby, and you might as well make up your mind to it.

RUBY. Save it till morning.

BERT. What I gotta tell you won't keep till morning.

RUBY (*crossly*). Well, what is it?

(*Now that the crucial moment has arrived,* BERT *hardly knows where to begin.*)

BERT. Turn around so's you can get me straight. Here's your kimono—slip it on.

RUBY. Say, who do you think you are! Not satisfied with battin' round till all hours of the night yourself, you gotta wake me up, too! Why can't you get in bed like a human being without disturbin' everybody in the hotel?

BERT (*solemnly*). There's a good reason why I woke you up, Ruby.

RUBY. Go on and spring it!

BERT (*hesitantly*). Ruby, you remember what we promised each other the day we got married?

RUBY (*hotly*). You wake me up in the dead o' night to ask me that!

BERT. You remember? We said if either one of us ever met up with someone we like better we'd be on the level and tell the other one right away.

(RUBY *is wide awake now.*)

RUBY. Say, what is this——!

BERT (*floridly*). I come to tell you, Ruby, I've met that someone to-night—a little girl, who, sorry as I am to tell you, means everything in the world to me.

RUBY (*dropping back on the pillows*). Aw, go to bed—you're drunk!

BERT (*hurt*). I'm not—I'm cold sober! And I'm in dead earnest. You ain't backin' out on our bargain, are you?

RUBY. Don't make me laugh! If anyone's fool enough to want you, I say take you and welcome! When they get to know you like I do they'll give you the air quick enough!

BERT. That's what *you* say! Well, no one can say I wasn't on the level with you. I've come clean with the whole story —no cheatin' behind your back like many a man woulda done.

RUBY. You wanta leave to-night?

BERT. There ain't no particular hurry now we understand

each other. But if you say so, we'll go over to Jersey tomorrow and file the divorce papers.

RUBY. You work fast, don't you! He comes in, tells me he's met a girl and now he wants a divorce! You're about as funny as a cry for help! Have you thought about our thirty weeks Fox time we just signed for?

BERT. Sure. I'll get you another pardner.

RUBY. That's good glue, but it don't stick!

BERT. And I'll give you all rights to our old routine.

RUBY. That's nice of you—since it's mine already.

BERT. Oh, is that so!

RUBY. The best of it's mine and you know it, Bert La Motte! Waltheim told me he gave us our booking on the strength of that comedy radio-phone dance number I framed. And who thought out the rapid-fire patter we use for a finish? We'd be chasers on a bill yet if it wasn't for me!

BERT. Is *that* so!

RUBY. Sure you'll give me the old routine! And what's more you'll starve to death if you have to go out as a single.

BERT. I'm not gonna do a single. Miss Doyle and I——

RUBY. So that's her name—Doyle, is it?

BERT. Miss Doyle and I're gonna head a flash act. We got a swell production doped out. We'll be playin' the Palace before the season's out.

RUBY (*with nice sarcasm*). What're you goin' to use for money?

BERT. Now, you needn't get nasty—just because I'm tryin' to do the right thing by you.

RUBY. Where'd you pick up this tramp? Headlining in Perth Amboy this week, I suppose?

(DOLLY *emerges from her seclusion, her feathers up.*)

DOLLY (*to* RUBY). Who're you callin' a tramp! You better be careful how you run a person down!

BERT. *Nix, Dolly!* I'll fix it up. . . .

RUBY (*astounded*). Who—who is—*this* . . . !

DOLLY. I'll let you know who I am if you call me a tramp again!

BERT (*trying to do the right thing*). Ruby, this is Miss Doyle. . . . Dolly, meet the missus!

(*There is an electric silence.*)

RUBY. You mean to say you brought her up here right under my nose!

BERT. How else could I show you I was on the level with you . . . open and above-board?

RUBY (*witheringly*). Well, for pure unadulterated nerve, you get the plaid earrings!

DOLLY (*to* BERT). I thought you said your wife would understand!

RUBY. He told you that, did he? Well, I do understand. I understand that I married the dumbest cluck that ever walked on two feet!

BERT. Aw, talk sense, Ruby!

RUBY. Sure, I'll talk sense! You brought your affinity up to meet me did you? Well, I'm glad to meet her. When she gets you she gets a prize package, I'll say! (*To* DOLLY.) Come closer, I want to congratulate you!

(DOLLY *hesitates until* BERT *nudges her.*)

DOLLY (*surprised*). You wanta congratulate me?

RUBY. Give me your hand on it. (DOLLY *cautiously extends her hand.*) I'm glad to shake it. Take him, and all I can say is, God help you!

BERT. What's the use o' bein' that way, Ruby? Can't we all part friends?

DOLLY (*to* BERT). I told you I oughtn'ta come up here!

(RUBY *is still holding* DOLLY'S *hand. She is staring at her intently.* DOLLY *tries to pull her hand away.*)

RUBY. No, let me look at you a minute.

BERT. What's the big idea?

RUBY. Say, where have we met before?

DOLLY (*in the grand manner*). *Have* we met before . . . ?

RUBY. You say your name is Doyle?

BERT. Dolly Doyle.

DOLLY. I ain't ashamed of it.

RUBY. We've met somewhere, that's sure.

DOLLY. That's what I said to your husband when we first come in.

RUBY. Where you been the last few years—what circuit, I mean?

DOLLY. Mostly Eastern time—Poli, Fox, Inter-state . . . some Gus Sun.

RUBY. Couldn't've been on any of them. We've been playin' Loew's since the Flood, seems to me.

DOLLY. Well, I don't know then.

RUBY. Ever do any specialties to speak of?

DOLLY. When I was a kid I done a number in rompers and pig-tails. Frances White stole all her stuff from me.

RUBY. The "Won't You Be My Beau" number?

DOLLY. That's the one! It was written for me specially by Roy Leddy—his first big hit. He's my brother——

RUBY (*excitedly*). I've got you now! Hazel Leddy! Little Hazel Leddy . . . !

DOLLY. That *was* me all right.

RUBY. Then, you don't remember me? . . . Ruby Nellis?

DOLLY. Not Ruby Nellis of "Henderson's School Days"!

RUBY. None other! . . . "Henderson's School Days!"

DOLLY. Ruby!

RUBY. Hazel!

(*Their manner toward each other changes instantly. They warmly embrace.* BERT, *who has been listening uneasily, now edges closer.*)

BERT. Say, what is this—Old Home Week!

(*The two women pay no attention to him. In disgust* BERT *lights a cigarette and waits for more.*)

RUBY. My Lord—how long ago's that been!

DOLLY. Don't ask me. Let's not think about it!

RUBY (*happily reminiscent*). *There* was a schooldays act for you! Gus Edwards ain't gotta thing on old Jake Henderson.

DOLLY. Jake passed in his checks last winter. Hear about it?

RUBY. I noticed it in *Variety*. Out in Tacoma, wasn't it? Bright's Disease. . . .

DOLLY. He was a good old wagon. Remember how he used to sorta daddy all o' us? I'll never forget how he'd make me take a dose o' castor oil when I looked like I needed it.

(*The two women laugh heartily.*)

RUBY. You remember Rose Wiess?

DOLLY. Do I? Didn't we used to fight in every town to see who'd get first shot at the electric iron we bought together?

RUBY. Well, when we played the Kedzie out in Chi last spring she caught our act and come round back to see me. She's married to an insurance agent. Got two kids and says she couldn't be no happier.

DOLLY. I bumped into Chic Howard up in Boston last month. He's managin' a burlesque house up there—rollin' in money. His own Buick and everything.

RUBY. Chic Howard! . . . Who'd ever thought that little bum would have amounted to anything!

DOLLY. He didn't have sense enough to come in outa the rain when we knew him.

RUBY. I suppose you've heard how Fred Link is knockin' 'em for a row of ash-cans on the Other Side. . . . Got a picture comp'ny of his own and writes his own contract. I met Solly Goldman in at the N.V.A. the other day—said Fred was touted to play leads with Pola Negri. I guess he's not gettin' on!

DOLLY. That sure was a great gang! At least, they all seemed great to me then. It was my first job. . . .

RUBY. I'll never forget the first day I saw you. It was in Omaha, or was it K.C.?

DOLLY. K.C. One of the girls got ptomaine, and Jake wires me to join the show. The thrill of my life!

RUBY. You sure were a pretty little thing; I remember you wore a purple hat with a flame-colored ostrich plume.

DOLLY. God, I was green . . . !

RUBY. But it didn't take you long to get wised up.

(BERT *tries to get a word in but the two women go on completely oblivious of him.*)

DOLLY. Yeh, but you know why? Because you were so white about showin' me the ropes, and keepin' my courage up. I'd a quit at the end o' that first week if you hadn't give me a talking-to.

RUBY. I didn't do no more than anyone would of.

DOLLY. Oh, yes you did. You were the only one at first that even give me a pleasant look.

RUBY. I just showed you how the routine went.

DOLLY. Well, what you done I've never forgot. . . . I may have forgot *you* for a while, but I never forgot your helpin' me. And I ain't never stopped bein' grateful either, Ruby.

(BERT *has endured these reminiscences as long as he can.*)

BERT (*barking*). Ain't you two had about enough o' that!

RUBY. You keep outa this, Bert La Motte! It's none of your business. We'll talk all night if we want to.

(BERT *continues his sulking.*)

DOLLY. After all you've done for me. . . . And to think I almost took him away from you! It must of been the gin.

RUBY (*looking hard at* BERT). You'd a been doin' me a favor to take him.

BERT (*ineffectually*). Oh, she would, would she!

DOLLY. Thank God, I found out about it in time. Just know this, Ruby, I wouldn't do anything to hurt or harm a hair o' yours for anything in the world. Your husband give me such a rush over at Pete's to-night that I sorta lost my head. But you can betcha I got my senses back now. And just to show you I mean it, I'll beat it right now and give you my word never to speak to him again.

BERT. What was I ever thinkin' of to bring you up here in the first place. . . !

RUBY. I'm tickled to death you did——

DOLLY. Else how would we ever 'a met again, Ruby?

RUBY (*warmly*). It's great to see you again. . . .

DOLLY (*taking* RUBY'S *hand*). I'm over at the La France—layin' off this week. Call me up and for lunch.

(*Suddenly a delicious bit of revenge comes into* RUBY'S *mind. She surreptitiously nudges* DOLLY.)

RUBY. It's so late gettin' back to your hotel, why don't you stay here the rest o' the night? We can have a good long talk about old times.

(DOLLY *at first is on the point of refusing, then the idea does not seem so preposterous.*)

DOLLY. Why, I don't know. . . .

RUBY. Come on, stay. (*Indicating* BERT'S *bed.*) Here's a nice bed all to yourself. We'll send Bert out for sinkers and coffee in the morning.

BERT (*flabbergasted*). Where do you think I'm gonna sleep?

RUBY (*carelessly*). Oh, on the floor. . . . Or if you'd rather there's a sofa in the parlor.

(BERT *starts to make a stinging reply, but only succeeds in sputtering instead.*)

DOLLY (*egged on by* RUBY). I'd love to stay if you don't think I'd be puttin' anyone out.

RUBY. Bert don't mind. Not when it's for *you*. . . .

BERT. The Hell I don't!

(*He dashes angrily from the room, slamming the door.* RUBY *and* DOLLY *break into laughter.*)

DOLLY. That's the way—treat 'em rough!

RUBY. He won't forget this night in a hurry. That sofa's hunch-backed . . . !

(RUBY, *convulsed, sinks back against the pillows.*)

CURTAIN

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